



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE DRAMA CARRIES ON

BY HENRY McDONALD SPENCER

THE everlasting preachment of critics who, like myself, have been constantly deprecating plays which are not "vital," "significant" or "worth while," undoubtedly has had some effect on the public taste, and the critical poison gas probably has contributed in some small degree to the passing of melodrama. It is a question, however, how far these pontifical utterances from the avatars of the intellectual drama are sincere, and whether the virtuosi of the drama—Popes of preciosity—do not themselves enjoy the kind of play which appeals to the midriff rather than to the brain. Indeed, there is strong ground for the opinion that the play which reaches the emotions through the intellect, and is supposed to make people think, is better read in the library than witnessed in the theatre.

Fortunately for the joy of living, the views of anemic young gentlemen wearing horn spectacles have not entirely controlled our dramaturgic output, and the unregenerate and much berated public will continue to wallow in the theatric provender it likes regardless of whether or not the menu pleases the person who takes the theatre seriously as an "educational and cultural factor" and who, incidentally, reads *The New Republic*. The public knows nothing about art, but it knows what it hates—it hates to think. However, there is room for both kinds of drama—the intense psychologic play on the one hand, and melodrama and the girl and music show at the other extreme of the dramaturgic gamut. There is a place for *The Saturday Evening Post* as well as THE

LOTUS, the "exclusive" Fifth Avenue shop and Gimbel Brothers.

One reason of my having apparently allied myself with the Bolsheviki and becoming (temporarily) a backslider from the old gods is contained in *Seven Days' Leave*, at the Park Theatre, and in the discovery that even the most sophisticated and hardened playgoer may still enjoy frank, forthright melodrama—or the play of sensational situation plus stage mechanics.

The obvious and intended appeal of melodrama is to the primitive and immature mind which still believes in Virtue and Vice as being two totally opposed principles, and not merely variants of the same thing or different degrees of the same thing. Also there is a new generation ever arising which looks on the play with the fresh, unspoiled eyes of inexperience, precisely as the very young regard Santa Claus or the myth of the stork: They are not quite convinced, but on the whole prefer to believe. On the other hand there is an interest in melodrama regarded as a theatric *tour de force*—in observing, without illusion, the ingenuity displayed in achieving effects—the viewpoint of the man in the wings, so to speak.

Of course *Seven Days' Leave* as a sensational war melodrama is entirely vulnerable to modern naturalistic criticism. Its absurdities are so apparent that they become interesting *qua* absurdities. No English staff officer, for example, would make a long speech to a junior, whom he was urging to perform some particularly distasteful duty, telling him how the

command of a company is "carried on" during a charge on a machine-gun emplacement. But that man is somewhat emasculated and lacking in red blood who can hear the "carry on" speech at the close of the first act without a thrill of intense emotion. It is absurd also to assume that British officers, the least boastful class of men in the world, would be constantly saying to each other that, "England, thank God, doesn't do things that way."

But when all due deductions are made *Seven Days Leave* fills its purpose—if the purpose of the drama is to take you out of yourself and transport you into a world of illusion where you can forget for the time the wheatless, heatless, eatless days which have been forced on this planet through the aggressions of the sadistic paranoiacs of Potsdam. In any event there is a fair gauge of youth in the reaction to melodrama, even if you are not sincere in hissing the villain in compliance with the time-honored custom.

Turning now to the "precious" players, the Washington Square Company presented in its third subscription bill what was, perhaps, the most interesting evening's entertainment of the season in any theatre. *Suppressed Desires*, by George Cram Cook and Susan Gaspell, deals with psychoanalysis (the subject of an essay in another department of this issue), and is an evidence of the avidity with which this clever company can seize on and satirise a fad even before the public knows its name. This is fulfilling the purposes of the Little Theatre with good measure, and quite justifies its existence. Imagine trying to spring *Suppressed Desires* in Broadway! *Pokey*, a satire on Pocahontas, by Philip Moeller, was simply unadulterated joy, and is worth a thousand rattlings of old bones like the author's *George Sand*, ably as he presented the virile authoress via Mrs. Fiske.

"Mother doesn't care what she says, as long as it fits the metre" is excellent criticism on poetry and, incidentally, on criticism itself. The critic doesn't care what he says, as long as it sounds smart. *Habit* exposed the hollowness of death-bed repentance, and *The Sandbar Queen* supplied Helen Westley with an excellent vehicle for her abilities.

The Madonna of the Future, by Alan Dale, with Emily Stevens in the title rôle, is a lady who decides to "live her own life" and shocks her neighbors by voluble expressions of disesteem toward matrimony. The epigrams with which the play is so plentifully interlarded are among the best which the author, in his capacity as critic, has heard in the theatre during his long professional experience. The theory that a woman, even if wealthy, would be willing to endure the pains of childbirth, and undertake the burden of rearing a child without the compensation of marital dignity is entirely too far-fetched to be at all representative. The ladies who toss their bonnets over the windmill are quite comprehensible if impelled by the urge of sex, or the amatory passion, but no one, excepting perhaps a Shavian heroine, would be willing to sacrifice the esteem of her neighbors merely for the sake of swelling the vital statistics relating to birth. Treated as farce, the subject would have possibilities, but as serious drama it lacks the quality of inevitability for which we moderns look in both plays and novels.

Of the other new plays which remain on the boards at this writing, *The Indestructible Wife*, by Frederic and Fanny Hutton, is obviously a vehicle for an athletic, young leading lady of the flapper type, and hangs purely on the personality of Minna Gombel, who plays the eponymous part. It should be called *The Impossible Wife*.

The favorite play of actor folk, the play

about actors, is represented in *Success*, by Adeline Leitzbach and Theodore A. Liebler, Jr. This is a modest and well-constructed piece, sympathetically interpreted by Brandon Tynan. It is rather curious that plays about players do not succeed as a rule, for in these the mummer is generally best suited, and the subject is intensely interesting to all non-professionals and to—all professionals.

The Heritage of Eugene Walter did not last long, perhaps because it was too like a spoken movie, and the audiences are fed up with this sort of melodrama in the cinema houses.

What should have been one of the plays of the season, Herman Bahr's *Josephine*, with Arnold Daly and Virginia Harned, did not last long, and is a further evidence that the historical play dealing with some definite personage, more or less visualised by the public, has had its day. None of these plays has made a success in recent years, and one would think that managers had learned their lesson by this time, and would refuse to gratify the vanity of performers by putting on acting vehicles without "vitality" or timely "significance" (see opening paragraph).

BY THE EDITOR

The Great Nature Fetish

THE cry of "Back to Nature" is a modern variant of the many Utopian dreams of the past, and surely is as fatuous as were Sir Thomas More's and Plato's conceptions of an Ideal Republic. It is a wail from the weary, of those who flinch from the pain of life, and seek an anodyne for the ache of existence, who are unequal to the strain of modernity. For them have been concocted such politico-economic nostrums as Socialism and other schemes to perpetuate the unfit by the formation of an endless breadline. Religious systems based on some form of auto-hypnotism have been invented, or borrowed from the East, to drug the world into a poppy sleep of mysticism; while alcohol and the opium derivatives principally are used among civilised peoples as the most convenient narcotics.

The narcotic impulse is essentially a desire to allay undue susceptibility and thereby revert to a primitive state; it is seeking Rest, an undisturbed contemplation of Nothing. A dog will lie for hours

in a half doze before the fire, and savages, negroes, peasants and other primitives are capable of extended periods of inertia without evidence of boredom. Normally such conditions are intolerable to highly organised and complex individuals, many of whom deliberately induce narcosis to attain mental ease and freedom from care. For the same psychological reasons emigration to Arcadia seems an easy way out; and the prospect is allied to the ancient wistful longings for a Golden Age, Ponce de Leon's search for the Fountain of Youth, and the Nirvana of Orientalism.

The cult of the Simple Life is based on the dread of life as it is, of its sternness and the realisation of duty; it is turning to the wall and seeking a little more slumber before getting up to face the world. That iconoclastic prophet of hardness, Nietzsche, saw the inwardness of cuddling oneself or others when he expressed contempt for pity. "Pain, and then more pain, is what we need." Incidentally, it may be said, he regarded